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Biographical sketch of
Señor Lic. Joaquín Casasus; ambassador
of Mexico to the United States.

New York, 1905.



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Biographical Sketch

OF

SEÑOR LIC. JOAQUIN D. CASASUS

AMBASSADOR OF MEXICO

TO THE

UNITED STATES

For the Solis Observa.

PRO PATRIÂ

New York
Office of Modern Mexico

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FERNANDO SOLIS CÁMARA

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P R E F A C E

The conviction I have that the future of Mexico depends upon the reciprocal relations that shall be maintained with the United States impels me, as germane thereto, to write and publish this little sketch of the personality and career of the recently appointed ambassador of my native country to the country of my sojourn and predilection.

As I am fully persuaded that a potent factor in preserving the good relations that exist and in augmenting the friendship that should ever endure between the two nations is intimate acquaintanceship between their best men, the chief object of this booklet is to serve as an auxiliary in introducing to eminent Americans one of the ablest men of the present epoch in Mexico.

If there be any error in the use of English in this little pamphlet, I crave the indulgence of the critical reader and offer him the apology of regrettably less familiarity with the language of Shakespeare than with that of Cervantes.

FERNANDO SOLIS CÁMARA.

New York City, August 1, 1905.



SEÑOR LIC. JOAQUÍN D. CASASUS,
Ambassador of Mexico to the United States.



ONE of the secrets of the phenomenally firm hold that President Diaz has upon the hearts of the people of Mexico is his unerring judgment in the selection of the right men for positions of honor and trust. He has just made an appointment, which will greatly augment his reputation at home for making wise selections and gain the increased respect and applause of all the world abroad, in designating Lic. Joaquin D. Casasus to be the ambassador of Mexico to the United States, to succeed the late Manuel de Azpiroz, whose remains were recently conveyed to Mexico on a warship of the American navy as a special mark of the good will and delicate regard of the great Saxon republic of the continent toward the nearest and most important and promising of its Latin sisters to the southward.

In Mexico, where the merits and qualifications of the distinguished appointee are so well known, this appointment is instantly recognized as an ideal one, and the statesmen, economists and litterateurs, as well as the bankers and other men of business in the United States, to whom the name of Casasus is not unknown, are ready to give him the most cordial and friendly welcome, as the able representative of their picturesque, rich and progressive neighbor, Mexico.

Joaquin D. Casasus was born at Frontera, a small port on the gulf, in the State of Tabasco, on December 22, 1858, of Spanish lineage, his parents being Don Francisco A. Casasus and Señora Doña Ramona Gonzales de Casasus.

"Proud hidalgo, son of Spain,
Whose forebears sailed the Spanish main,"

Casasus is now in the prime of life, being forty-seven years old. Though born in Tabasco, he was reared in Yucatan, and it was in El Instituto Literario de Yucatán (The Literary Institute of Yucatan) where he began his studies, so that the Yucatecos not unreasonably claim him as a son of Yucatan.

Señor Casasus is of short stature and of firm, muscular build, active and healthy and of imposing appearance. The best feature in the personality of Casasus is his eyes, which are large, piercing and jet black. When he speaks his expression is very animated and pleasing, even captivating. He speaks English and French very well and reads German. One fact which expresses volumes for his self-control, personal poise and keen judgment on hygiene is that though among smokers, he never smokes, and though having constant and intimate dealings with drinkers, he abstains from all alcoholic drinks.

He is very regular in his habits. His routine of life in Mexico is as follows: He gets up at 6 o'clock and then works until 8, when he takes breakfast and goes out walking until 9 o'clock; then he goes to his office where he arrives at about 9.15. He works until 12.30, then he takes a very light lunch and resumes work at 1 o'clock. He works until 7 and then leaves for home, where he dines at 7.30. Then if some entertainment offers special

attraction to him or to his family, such as the opera, he goes; if not, he remains at home with his wife and children.

From the college in Yucatan he went to the capital to complete his preparation for his profession, that of the law, in the National Law School there, and he took his degree in 1880, passing the examination most creditably. His talent and assiduity as a student commanded the attention and admiration of the faculty and students, who recognized in the youth the qualities that have made the man so conspicuous among the ablest men of Mexico that the keenest judge of men in Mexico has chosen him for the difficult and honorable post of ambassador of the republic at Washington.

Casasus was about twenty-two years of age when he completed his law studies; and soon afterward, returning to his native State, he chose the capital, San Juan Bautista, as the field wherein to commence his career as a lawyer. But the services of the brilliant young lawyer were soon required by the Governor, whose secretary he became; then he filled the post of editor of the official journal of the State, and finally became First Secretary of State of the State of Tabasco, discharging the duties of each place with marked skill and success. The State capital was too restricted a field for capacities so extraordinary as those of Casasus, and when he was about twenty-four years of age, he determined to make the City of Mexico, whither he then went, the center of his future labors in his career. His superior abilities enabled him almost at once to establish himself as a lawyer of uncommon merit, soon winning an enviable fame in the practice of the law. He became known as one of the ablest lawyers in the City of Mexico, and his fame was not confined to that capital, but he gained an international reputation as a corporation lawyer, and foreign as well as domestic corporations have been eager to avail themselves of his services. His opinions are held in the highest esteem by his colleagues, so much so that he has acquired the appellation of a lawyer of lawyers.

Señor Casasus is not merely a lawyer, but he is an economist of ability, having made a special study of political economy.

In 1884 he was commissioned to settle the question or the controversy of the English debt of Mexico. This task he performed to the great advantage of the republic and at the same time to the entire satisfaction of all the creditors.

In 1886 he was elected a representative in Congress and has served continuously since, having been re-elected to every succeeding legislature. The cases of President Diaz and Representative Casasus seem to illustrate a practice of the Mexican people to retain in office a good man when they find one. Señor Casasus has always served on the committees on appropriations since the time of his entrance into the Chamber of Deputies. Three years after, in 1889, he was elected president of the commission which revised the Commercial Code of Mexico, and the amendments adopted by this commission were almost exclusively his work.

He was our delegate to the International Monetary Conference held at Bruxelles in 1892 to consider matters of universal interest and of most important character.

In 1896, he was appointed chairman of the commission to which was entrusted the duty of drafting a bill regulating the business of banking. The bill provided by this

commission was enacted into a law, March 19, 1897; and, under it, the tremendous development of the banking business in our country has been realized. Prior to the enactment of this law there were only the ten following chartered banks in the republic:

Nacional de México.
De Londres y México.
Minero de Chihuahua.
De Yucatán.
Mercantil de Yucatán.
De Durango.
De Zacatecas.
De Nuevo León.
Comercial de Chihuahua.
Internacional y Hipotecario de México.

In the period of seven years to March, 1904, there was an increase to thirty-two in the number of chartered banks; of \$22,068,650 in cash holdings; of \$90,060,671 in bills receivable; of \$51,242,540 in loans on personal property; of \$16,356,957 in hypothecary loans, and of \$96,684,184 in current debtors' accounts. The capital was increased during these seven years \$67,000,800; notes in circulation, \$43,295,037; sight deposits, \$12,922,584; and a reserve fund to the amount of \$18,277,174.

Early in his college days he manifested a strong taste for economic studies, to which he gave close attention and in which branch of learning he soon became an expert; and that he has been making independent and brilliant researches in this field is evidenced by the long list of his works written on that and kindred subjects. He thus became known to his fellow countrymen as a well-equipped economist, and as a consequence held many important positions requiring special ability and training. For many years he was professor of political economy in the National School of Engineers. His eminence in this field of investigation has gained for him the distinction of membership in the Society of Political Economy of Paris. He is president of the School of Commerce, an institution in whose curriculum the study of political economy holds very prominent place.

His predilection for economics, his early and thorough preparation in that science, and the experience he has had on the many commissions on which he has served have combined to produce the result of the writing and the publishing of a considerable number of treatises, orations and monographs on political economy and related subjects. The following are the titles of his principal works of this class:

"La Libranza."
"The Debt Contracted in London."
"The Banking Question."
"Institutions of Credit."
"The Silver Question in Mexico."
"The Monetary Problem."
"The International Conference of Bruxelles,"
(which was a lecture delivered in 1893—by request
in the French language—before the Society of
Social and Political Economy of Lyons, France).
"History of Taxes on Gold and Silver."
"The Depreciation of Silver and Its Remedies."
"Institutions of Credit in Mexico."
"The Mexican Peso and Its Rivals in the Extreme Orient."
"Reports of the Monetary Commission."

An economist so obviously well equipped for the task could not, of course, escape service on the Monetary Commission, which was created by act of February 4, 1903, the function of which it was to make a profound study of the currency problem in all its phases. He became chairman of the subcommittee of the Commission, to which was assigned the task of determining the effects on the national wealth of the depreciation of silver and to answer the crucial and fundamental question:

"Is it desirable to bring about the greatest possible fixity in the ratio of value between the currency of Mexico and the monetary standards of the foreign nations with which Mexico chiefly trades?"

The lucid report this subcommittee made is from the pen of Casasus and shows most strikingly the solidity and profundity of his attainments in political economy and is an admirable product of deep research, philosophic acumen and ripe scholarship.

Casasus was also a member of the subcommittee on which devolved the task of framing specific recommendations and of devising ways and means for carrying the monetary reform into execution. His contributions to the deliberations of this subcommittee were most brilliant, able and practical.

At once upon the inauguration of the monetary reform, exchange became fixed, fluctuations ceased and the value of Mexican money became in consequence a stable quantity, and not as theretofore subject to constant variations. Bankruptcies became less frequent, and failures that would have been produced under the old system were avoided, for it is indisputable that one of the great evils of the silver system was that bankruptcies were often directly caused by it. The economical status of the country has been generally and very materially improved, for now foreign capital can rely upon the constancy of the value of Mexican money and therefore does not hesitate to invest in mines, industries, agricultural enterprises, etc., the currency of the country no longer being exposed to the blight of a continuous and progressive depreciation.

The gold standard—the greatest economic reform in the history of our country, not excepting even that other most notable reform* by which free interstate trade was secured—has been thoroughly established, and is in successful and satisfactory operation. Thus the services of Señor Casasus to our country in the overthrow of the old monetary system—a work he materially helped to accomplish—have been of the greatest value.

Señor Casasus is a member of the Spanish Academy, a member of the Society of Political Science of Bruxelles, and a member of the Society of Political and Social Science of Philadelphia. He is president of the Liceo Altamirano, which is the highest literary academy in Mexico, named in honor of our great patriot, statesman and poet, Ignacio M. Altamirano. This society or literary institute Señor Casasus reorganized and he devotes much time and labor to make its periodical reunions and symposia most valuable and interesting.

*NOTE.—Mr. Limantour, by means of a most wise and salutary amendment to the Constitution, accomplished the abolition of the local tax on Mexican goods, a result which all our financiers had struggled unsuccessfully for more than half a century to secure. This barbarous practice was an inheritance from the old Spanish rule, and had the effect of virtually suppressing all interstate commerce as effectively as does brigandage, war or pestilence.

He is also a practical business man. He is a large real estate owner, his holdings of real property in the City of Mexico being of considerable importance.

The new ambassador contributes liberally whenever appeals are made to him in behalf of worthy objects. He is discriminately generous. He gives his professional services and advice gratis to charitable institutions, and is active in the founding of schools. He is a decided protector of promising literary fledglings. He has lent a helping hand to many struggling students, young artists and litterateurs through maintaining them by employment in the banks he controls and he has often unostentatiously relieved distress among the humble and the unfortunate by his delicate supply of opportune assistance.

Señor Casasus was a delegate to the Second Pan-American International Conference, held in the City of Mexico in 1901-2, and was appointed to the office of General Secretary, which, as he filled the post, was not less important than the presidency of the Conference, for those who are familiar with the transactions of the Conference know that more than once, at the times of greatest tension and conflict of opinion and interest, its disruption was averted by the wisdom, tact and conciliatory counsel of Casasus, fortified and upheld by the action of the accomplished chairman of the Congress, Lic. Genaro Raigosa.

Here, as is his habit everywhere, Casasus acted the part of the most courtly gentleman that he is, for no matter how exacting and perturbing his official duties may, at times, have been in that experimental Universal Congress of the Nations of America, Casasus was invariably most affable, generous and considerate toward all, doing his utmost to preserve harmony and to develop amity.

Moreover, Señor Casasus performed the exacting and momentous services that fell to the lot of the Secretary General of the Conference not only without pecuniary compensation, just as all our other delegates served, but, in so doing, he did not hesitate to sacrifice his personal and professional interests—precisely as he may always be expected to do in behalf of larger and of even sentimental aims—for Casasus is a patriot and a man of the broadest public spirit, as this case well illustrates, and as is abundantly demonstrated by his ready sacrifice of his own pecuniary interests whenever the opportunity offers itself to promote, by so doing, the welfare of our country. His acceptance of the principalship of the School of Commerce with its onerous duties is another instance of this self-sacrifice, but a still more striking one is his acceptance of the ambassadorship, which necessitates the relegation to second place of his established and productive business as a lawyer in the City of Mexico, which is worth many times the salary he will receive as ambassador.

Repeatedly during the Conference he extended to the delegates an elegant and lavish hospitality at his delightful home, diplomatically disposing the chief delegates in congenial and convenient groups at his tables to promote acquaintanceship, produce mutual understanding and establish the harmony so necessary to achieve the best results from this tentative legislative union of the American Nations.

Upon Casasus devolved the duty of delivering the oration at the obsequies of Senhor Jose Hygino Duarte Pereira, the Brazilian delegate, who died during the time of the Conference. This oration, able and beautiful, was appreciated and lauded warmly by all who heard it.



SEÑORA DOÑA CATALINA ALTAMIRANO DE CASASUS,
Wife of the Mexican Ambassador to the United States.

Though as a lawyer Señor Casasus has perhaps the most extensive and important practice in Mexico and the largest American clientèle, he has risen to eminence not only in the profession of law and in the field of political economy as teacher, writer and legislator, as has been shown, but he has given long and earnest study to the science of banking. He has large and very important banking interests. He is a shareholder in many of the banks of Mexico and is interested in most of them directly or indirectly. As a legislator he has, thus equipped, been fertile in practical initiatives for the benefit of the commercial and financial interests of Mexico. He was chiefly instrumental in founding the Banco Central (The Central Bank) of which he is now the vice-president, a bank which has done a work of inestimable value in harmonizing and unifying the methods of the State banks of Mexico. The accomplishment of this end has produced most important advantages to the business community, for the affiliation, actual or nominal, formal or tacit, of the State banks with the strong central institution in the capital, is regarded by our business world as a mark of sound and conservative management and is accepted as a guarantee of solvency and stability. This system produces also the effect of the national banking system of the United States in that the notes of the State banks circulate freely throughout the republic.

It was due to the masterly exposition of the principles underlying the banking business and the strong and lucid arguments of Señor Casasus in the debates of this Congress—for he frequently took active part in the debates—that the inopportune project of a Pan-American bank—a somewhat visionary and premature scheme, characterized by Casasus as a mirage in his speech opposing it—failed to secure the endorsement of the Conference.

The home life of Casasus is ideal. His wife is Señora Doña Catalina Altamirano de Casasus, daughter of the eminent statesman, poet and litterateur, Ignacio M. Altamirano, whose memory is honored and held in affectionate regard by all who knew him. He died about twelve years ago on the Italian Riviera, being at the time consul-general of Mexico in France. He was one of our great liberals, a man of admirable character and pristine virtue and a strong supporter of that noblest of all Mexican patriots, Juárez.

Señor Altamirano was undoubtedly the greatest of our poets. He was known as "El Maestro," the teacher, *poeta poetarum*.

He was one of the makers of the present Constitution of Mexico, the establishment of which overthrew the tyrannical domination of the clergy and which is the basis of the rapidly increasing and wonderful development of Mexico.

He was a partisan of the great Juárez, with whom he co-operated, and a man who had the confidence and special respect of General Díaz. He wrote several volumes of poetry and contributed a prologue to the translation of Longfellow by Casasus, which shows his close acquaintance with American literature.

Señora Casasus is greatly loved for her splendid qualities. She is a most accomplished social star, radiant with rare sweetness and sincerity. Her receptions, which are attended by the élite of the capital, native and foreign, are given every Thursday. She is very charitable, very religious and an intimate friend of Señora Díaz, wife of the President.

That Señora Casusus and her exceptionally able husband will win in Washington's political, diplomatic and social circles new credit and good will for Mexico is unquestioned.

Casusus can not be reproached with the infamy of race suicide, against which President Roosevelt inveighs so forcefully, for he has seven children. On this score at least he must be *persona grata* at Washington, but there are so many things to recommend Señor Casusus to President Roosevelt and his active and capable advisers that he must be *par excellence persona gratissima* there.

Casusus as a boy enjoyed the inestimable benefits of the tropic sun, running barefooted on the sands of Yucatan; and, unfettered with any but the lightest and slightest clothing, he bathed in the salutary sunshine and breathed deeply and freely of the pure, balmy air under the clear, blue skies of our beloved Yucatan, developing that stalwart physique and those extraordinary powers of endurance characteristic of the Yucateco. There also he began the equally wholesome, strong and admirable intellectual development that he possesses, for it was in early youth that his taste turned to Latin literature, and he soon became an enthusiastic student of the Latin classics. His devotion to them has never ceased—never suffered even interruption—for through all his public and professional life, however active and engrossing his duties may have been, he has always taken time to cultivate *belles lettres*. He has, under all circumstances, and everywhere, given special and loving attention to the Latin classics. He devotes Sundays to this choice work. He remains at home all day Sunday, reserving that day for this literary work exclusively. He works at that as hard on Sunday as at his professional work on the other days of the week. He would not consider at all the best business on Sunday.

It may seem strange that so busy a man as Casusus can find time for such diversified and important pursuits, but the explanation is supplied by the recent observation of an English journalist, who, after visiting Washington and finding that President Roosevelt, despite the manifold duties of his station, could so arrange his days as to keep in touch with both modern and ancient literature, remarked that, as Spencer points out, it is precisely the busy man who succeeds in making the leisure for all desirable objects.

Señor Casusus is thus more than a mere lawyer, more than a mere economist, more than a teacher, a diplomat and legislator, more than an author of books on economics. There is a higher, subtler, more refined manifestation of the intellectual life of Casusus than any of these. He is a *litterateur*—a Latinist who devotes his choice time and eager intelligence to the profound study and critical appreciation of Latin authors. He has the cultivated taste and the noble sentiments of the poet and the philosopher. There is thus a greater, a loftier Casusus than the man we see in the legislative assembly or in the forum. It is Casusus the student, the sage, Casusus the creator of literary gems and the dextrous translator of the literary treasures in other tongues into his native, mellifluous Spanish. He is preëminently *homo multarum literarum*; *inter Graecos Graecissimus, inter Latinos Latinissimus*.

In his youth—when he was about twenty years old—he translated Longfellow's *Evangeline*, and that version is regarded by Spanish critics as a classic. He translated later the *Odes* of Horace and the *Bucolics* of Virgil, wrote a critique on Cayo Valerio Catulo

(Catullus) as well as a life of this author. Still later he produced a remarkable collection of beautiful sonnets in imitation of the Latin classics, which is published in a volume entitled "La Musa Antigua;" an extraordinary study of Julius Cæsar; and, recently, a volume of the elegies of Tibullus, Lygdamis and Sulpitia, just now in course of distribution among his friends.

There is space to present in this sketch only one of the sonnets just mentioned. We have selected one and translated it into English prose to give the bare ideas of the beautiful Spanish verse, the choice aroma and charm of which are inaccessible except through knowledge of the Spanish:

EL CIRCO ROMANO.

El circo está, como jamás, henchido;
La plebe aguarda de entusiasmo llena,
Y del circo los ámbitos atruena
De las fieras cercanas el rugido.

Y un cristiano aparece; un alarido
El pueblo lanza; hirsuta la melena,
Glaucos los ojos, á la ardiente arena
Salta un león del África. Un gemido

Escúchase tan sólo, y al instante
Del golpe rudo al formidable empuje
Rodar vése al cristiano agonizante.

La roja sangre el entusiasmo excita,
Se alza el león sobre su presa, ruge,
Y el pueblo aplaude y delirante grita.

THE ROMAN CIRCUS.

The circus is filled as never before with people.
The rude crowd waits eager for the spectacle. The
place resounds with the roaring of the wild beasts
that are near.

A Christian appears. From the crowd bursts forth
a wild shout. With heavy mane and fiery eye, the
African lion leaps to the hot arena.

A sigh only is heard, and at the moment of the
forceful impact of the rough leap, the Christian is
seen to fall and lie writhing in the throes of death.

The red blood rouses the enthusiasm of the crowd;
the lion rises over his victim, roars and the spectators
applaud and shout in frenzy.

These purely literary works are always printed for private distribution only, and the receipt of a numbered copy with the author's autograph is a coveted distinction.

In the study of the Latin classics, he has discovered a powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life; he has found the secret of true living as it was evolved by the best thought of one of the most glorious epochs in human history—an epoch, which it is perhaps too optimistic to hope that humanity still holds the potency to surpass. This study has developed in Casasus a culture, a refinement, an elegance and a subtle power that permeate and illumine his scientific and practical work and apotheosize the man.

Thus it is that this study of the classics—those literary monuments which are our chief inheritance of "the glory that was Rome"—has brought into all the work and activity of Casasus the benign influence of the poets and philosophers of the past, has revived the essence and the spirit of Roman life and thought and aspiration, to shape and to adorn the career of this able man, and to guide, through him, in some degree, the republic of Juarez to a greater and nobler destiny.

Finis.

